

RECENT THEORIES OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Granted that education has a certain value of its own, we must still ask ourselves what role we shall assign it in national development. Educational systems are expensive and must be weighed against other possible development projects in drawing up a list of priorities for developing countries. It is necessary, therefore, to establish clearly the relationship between education and development.

During the past two decades there have been at least four major shifts in the way this relationship has been perceived by development theorists and economists. An understanding of these shifts is crucial if anyone wishes to comprehend the changes in development policy throughout the Third World in the last twenty years and, more specifically, the educational decisions that were made in the Trust Territory. The theories that we will review here have had, and are still having, a profound effect on the course of educational planning here in Micronesia.

It should be noted that for most of the period with which we are concerned here, development was generally identified with economic development. This is borne out by the fact that the most common indices of "development" during the 1960s and before were: 1) growth of Gross National Product, 2) technological advance and rate of industrialization, 3) improved living standards. Present-day thinking, however, is less disposed to regard development as only an abbreviated form of economic development. The meaning of development has been broadened to embrace more than merely economic growth, as will be seen. While this may be an enrichment of a term, the task of defining a changing relationship is none the easier when the meaning of one of the terms of the relationship is itself shifting.

1. Disregard of Education

In the post-War years, education was generally neglected as a factor in the economic development of what later came to be called the Third World countries. While education was always regarded as humanizing and desirable for all people, it was seen as something of a luxury for those countries struggling to produce enough to feed their populations. The real imperative for these countries was an increase in productivity, and this meant modernization of productive methods—factories,

utilization of resources, and so forth. The principal means of achieving this was the formation of sufficient capital in the country to permit industrialization and development of the infra-structure. Accumulation of savings from within the country or adequate inflow of foreign aid from abroad were the prerequisites for economic development. Several studies (the most popular of which was Rostow's The Stages of Economic Growth) purported to show the close correlation between capital formation and economic growth in the industrialized nations of the West. This was assumed to hold equally true for non-industrialized, more traditional countries elsewhere.

2. "Investment in Man"

During the early 1960s a startling reversal of development theory took place. More intensive studies of economic growth revealed that only a part of it could be explained by the amount of capital investment. Other factors seemed to be at least as important in development. One correlation that loomed large in the studies by economists at this time was that between the level of education and economic growth. Some found a close relationship between elementary education and GNP; other maintained that higher education was the decisive factor; still others argued that general literacy was the important element. Assuming that the level of education bore a causal relationship to economic growth, economists tended to see "investment in human resources" as the essential condition for economic development. This meant, in practice, that foreign aid to developing countries was to be allocated primarily for hospitals and schools rather than for factories.

This was the age in which the AESCP school building program was begun in the Trust Territory. It was within this theoretical context that the Solomon Report announced a "revised policy [that] places the schools, more than any other public institution and agency, in the vanguard of a deliberate program of cultural change.

The justification for this reversal of development theory went thus: No economic development can take place in a society until the people embrace values favorable to modernization and progress and until they are trained in the basic skills needed in a transitional society. The "crust of custom" needed to be broken

before change could occur. Traditional attitudes which discouraged development had to be properly shaken, and there was no better way to do this than to whet the material appetites of the people. This would lead them in time to turn to Western patterns of production and use of resources.

For other theorists, the primary place of education in development was more a matter of recognizing the value of capital investment in human beings. Gunnar Myrdal, whose Asian Drama reflects in great part the thinking of this period, quotes a representative statement: "Countries are underdeveloped because most of their people are underdeveloped, having had no opportunity of expanding their potential capital in the service of society."

The thinking on economic development had undergone this shift: the cause of economic growth was seen as the "capacity to create wealth rather than the creation of wealth itself." Thus, every graduate of a school in a developing country was regarded as a valuable resource capable of making a significant contribution to economic development. In time, the investment in his education would be returned to the country many times over.

3. Rejection of the Panacea

By the late 1960s it had become clear that investment in education and health did not in itself guarantee development any more than capital formation did. Education, which had once been neglected in development, had thereafter been given the dominant place in aid programs to developing countries. Neither approach proved a spectacular success. Critics soon warned of taking education out of the context of the multiple and complex forces at work in a society and assigning it too great an importance in development. They cautioned that something more than insecticides, tractors and education were needed for increasing agricultural productivity. Other sorts of institutional reforms—for example, land reform programs—were recognized as a necessary ingredient of development. If education was a prerequisite for economic growth, it was by no means the only one and perhaps not even the most important.

Critics of the "Investment in Man" theory of development pointed out that education could hinder rather than promote economic growth. A case study of Kerala, one of the states of India, showed how educational expansion could lead to

political instability, social unrest, and retardation of economic growth in certain circumstances. The older idea governing educational acceleration in developing countries—"There can never be too much of a good thing."—was now under fire from many quarters. In its place came the idea of "controlled education" for developing countries. Educational expansion must take place within the limits imposed by capital formation in the country. It must not outpace the ability of the economy to absorb its products.

This led to another question being raised. If education could actually set back economic development, when allowed to run wild, might not it also retard social development in certain instances? A balance was required between the educational thrust and the development of other institutions in the Third World. Otherwise, education might well be counterproductive in terms of over-all development. Education, therefore, was no longer seen as an unqualified good.

4. Education As Barrier to Development

By the beginning of this decade a small but growing number of social critics were heard to proclaim that formal education was not a mixed blessing at all for Third World countries; it was a real obstacle to development. For Ivan Illich, Paulo Freire and others who were at the vanguard of this movement, "development" had acquired a new definition. The measure of development was no longer an increased productivity and more dollars. National and individual wealth was now seen as secondary to a sense of power—the ability to make real choices and shape one's own future. A certain level of national affluence is the condition for achieving this power, provided it does not lead to domination by the wealthy world powers.

Just as development means freedom from national impotence, it also implies liberation from powerlessness for all social groups within the country. The elimination of social inequality takes on special prominence in this concept of development. And here is where formal education, as embodied in the Western school, comes under severe attack. By sorting people out into categories of its own making (PhDs, ABs, high school graduates, dropouts), it leads to class stratification and actually promotes social inequality. Formal education systems, the critics charge, produce a sense of dependence and helplessness among those whom they purport to help. People learn to mistrust their own power to engage in meaningful learning outside of a school.

The Western school, Illich maintains, is as much the product of an industrialized society—and therefore just as inappropriate to many developing countries—as the skyscraper and the fast express train. His quarrel is not with education as such, but with the costly types of formal education that devour a large chunk of the national budget for the benefit of an elite representing only a tiny fraction of the national population. Others contend that the supposed economic gains from education are largely illusory. The consumption of the educated eventually outstrips their productivity, education being not the least expensive of the commodities they learn to consume. The result is a society outdoing itself to keep up with educational demands.

In the last analysis, the system of formal education transplanted in developing countries from foreign shores is self-defeating as a means of achieving development.

CONCLUSION

It would be hard to conceive of a greater fluctuation in theories than that which has taken place within the past twenty years. Education, which was at first ignored as a force in development, then became the magic key to attaining economic growth. Not long afterwards it was demystified, although still accorded an important place in national development. Now, as the disenchantment with the results of development during the 1960s grows, education (or at least the formal education with which we are most familiar) is, in the eyes of some, a real obstacle to a more broadly defined development.

One of the purposes of studying history is to assist us in relativizing the dogmas of a particular age so that we can discern what is of lasting value. This is particularly important for us as we attempt to focus on the meaning of education in overall development. Our schools in Micronesia were built on the limited theoretical foundations of the early 1960s, and they are being attacked from other limited premises that we work from today. It is impossible for educators to ignore the critical question of the relationship between education and overall development, and unwise for us to see only a little bit of the question. Perhaps this survey will help us gain a larger perspective.